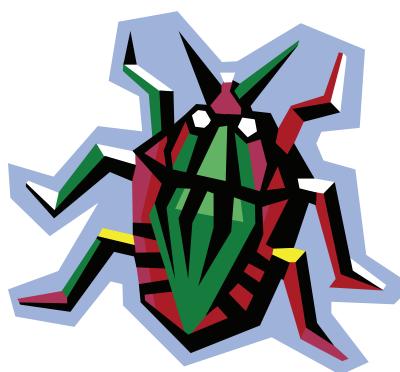


From the Seattle-King County Health Care for the Homeless Network
October 2008

Bed Bugs: Let's Band Together and Create a Unified Front



In 2006, we reported that “a few sites” serving homeless people had reported bed bugs on the premises. Predictably the number of sites dealing with bed bugs has grown. Low-income housing providers as well as hotels and motels managers in our area are also reporting bed bug problems.

What are bed bugs? Are they the same as body lice or scabies?

- ◆ No, bed bugs are a true bug. They also go by the name *Cimex lectualrius*.
- ◆ The adult is about the size and color of an apple seed, has an oval shape, 6 legs and no wings.
- ◆ Young bed bugs are difficult to see, they are about the size of a poppy seed, flat, and may be white, tan or brown.

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What sort of life style do bed bugs have?

- ◆ They are mostly nocturnal, hiding in the seams of mattresses and other parts of the bed during the day, and coming to visit their sleeping victim at night. If seen by day, they are usually scurrying for a hiding place.
- ◆ They also hide out in the cracks in walls, floors, and in other furniture.
- ◆ They crawl into suitcases and back packs, which give them rides to new homes and new victims.
- ◆ Stealthily, they find exposed skin, inject a blood thinner to make the victims blood flow more easily and begin feeding. They feed for 5-10 minutes at a time.
- ◆ Most people do not feel the initial bite, but find alarming red bites on themselves in the morning.

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Bed Bugs (continued)

Do bed bugs have any special powers or abilities?

Yes! It is important to know about these powers in order to mount a viable offense against them:

- ◆ They have exceptional hiding abilities; they can flatten out and fit in small spaces and they evade pesticide application by hiding in walls and ceilings. When disturbed, they quickly beat a retreat into the nearest cracks, crevices, nooks or crannies,
- ◆ They have the ability to locally anesthetize the victim so the bite is less noticeable.
- ◆ They can detect the presence of humans by concentrations of CO₂, carbon dioxide, the gas emitted when we exhale. At night, concentrations of CO₂ are higher where people are sleeping and not moving about.
- ◆ They also detect humans by heat detection.
- ◆ They can live a year — and some say up to 18 months — without a meal. So vacating a room even for a year and a half will not necessarily rid that room of bed bugs.
- ◆ They lay eggs in a sticky web like nest in the bedstead, in furniture, and in cracks and crevices in the walls or floor. The nests are not easily removed, and require scrubbing to get rid of them.

Do they pose a health threat?

- ◆ The *only* good news about bed bugs is that they do not spread diseases, as mosquitoes spread West Nile Virus or malaria, for example. They have never been implicated in this way.
- ◆ The bad news is that the bites can be itchy, and when people scratch, they can open the skin to infection.
- ◆ Some people have significant allergic reactions to the bites.

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October Means Cold and Flu Season — Are You Ready?

With the fall comes influenza. Homeless people are particularly vulnerable to the flu, and this year we are expecting three flu strains that are completely different from last year's. The flu vaccine protects against all three strains, and The CDC now recommends that all children be vaccinated as well as all adults. Vaccine is plentiful this year with no shortage anticipated, and it is available now.

(Cold and Flu Prevention Tips on p. 5)



This year's flu shot
contains 3 new
strains that were
not in last year's
vaccine

Bed Bugs (continued)

How can you tell if you have bed bugs on site?



Photo: Department of Medical Entomology
Westmead Hospital

"With a bright flash light, carefully inspect all areas of the bed, with special attention to the seams in the mat or mattress."

- ◆ Indications that there may be bed bugs present include victims complaining of bites. Also look for brownish rusty spots on the sheets or mattress. That is what bed bug feces look like. A trained eye can also detect the “castings”, the bugs shed their outer “skin” between the 5 growth stages they go through to reach adulthood.
- ◆ With a bright flash light, carefully inspect all areas of the bed, with special attention to the seams in the mat or mattress. Look about the head board and all parts of the frame. You should remove the mattress to get a good view of the bed parts. Look in any nearby furniture, open drawers and pull furniture away from the walls. Look carefully in corners and cracks.
- ◆ A very bad infestation may also be detected by a strange smell, likened to the spice coriander.
- ◆ A current infestation can only be confirmed by finding live, crawling bed bugs.
- ◆ If you are not familiar with bed bugs or not sure about what you are looking at, capture a couple and carefully put them in a zip lock bag, or tape them onto a sheet of paper with clear adhesive tape. Call Heather Barr, Public Health Nurse, at 206-263-8347, and she can help you make a positive ID. Also you could show your specimen to the pesticide company representative, A competent pest control operator will not treat without getting assurance that bed bugs are the true culprit.

Once we know that bed bugs are the problem what do we do?

- ◆ Don't panic. Begin to mount a strategic, calculated defense.
- ◆ Thorough cleaning of the environment is imperative. Scrub all parts and surfaces of the bed and other furniture with a stiff brush and any sort of cleaner that is safe for those surfaces
- ◆ Get a very powerful vacuum, and vacuum all parts of the bed and furniture, the floor, the walls, with special attention to cracks and crevices.
- ◆ Clothing in the area should be washed in hot water and thoroughly dried in the dryer.
- ◆ Any unsalvageable furniture should go directly into a locked dumpster. This will help reduce the possibility of re-infestation by people picking up bed bug ridden furniture and introducing the bugs to new homes. Many communities mark discarded furniture with warnings like "Do not Use! Bedbugs Present!"
- ◆ Other unsalvageable, heavily infested items should go directly into heavy duty plastic garbage bags, sealed and disposed of.

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Bed Bugs (continued)

More Bed Bug Suggestions:

- ◆ Calk all wall cracks
- ◆ Encase the mattress in a plastic cover, and seal it shut with duct tape. This will lock any bed bugs inside the mattress cover, and they will die, eventually. The outside of the plastic case will not be good harborage for any new bugs.
- ◆ Contact a reputable Pest Control Operator with bed bug experience. Do not attempt to manage the pest control on your own.
- ◆ Begin asking clients about bites. Ask current residents, and ask new residents on intake. If clients complain of bites or itching or rash, have them stash their belongings in air tight plastic bins. If they are porting bugs in their belongings, this will trap them until they can go through their things and launder the washables. Bed bugs do not usually make nests in people's clothes and belongings, they nest where people sleep, they are not found outdoors. They do not live on the person's body, but may be there accidentally while going from having a meal (the victim's blood) back to their hiding spots (the bed, the walls, etc.)
- ◆ Clients may also have other conditions that may be similar to bed bug bites. Scabies, body lice, crab lice, fleas, anxiety, chronic skin conditions, poor hygiene and reactions to medications can cause itching and scratching.
- ◆ Institute a policy about used furniture. Make sure any used furniture gets a thorough inspection by someone on your staff.
- ◆ Make cleaning, vacuuming and removal of clutter a routine, at least twice daily. If you can involve clients in assisting, do so. Share information and educate the clients. Make sure they understand that you are doing all you can to get the situation remedied. Let them know that their cooperation is needed and appreciated.



The adult is about the size and color of an apple seed, has an oval shape, 6 legs and no wings.

HCHN is convening a Bed Bug task Force

We are currently recruiting members. If you are interested, please contact Heather Barr at 206-263-8347. We will also be circulating a survey to find out more about the breadth of this problem in our community. This is in no way to be construed as assignment of guilt or punishment. Together, with honesty, transparency, clear communication and sharing of knowledge, we can work cooperatively to reduce the impact of these pesky creatures.

Let's build a united front to battle these bugs!





Public Health Faces Budget Challenges

Public Health programs play an important role in access to care for homeless people. In 2007, 13,250 homeless people accessed medical and dental care, family planning, immunizations, prenatal care, and other health services through public health's clinical programs.

As you may have heard, Public Health-Seattle & King County is facing difficult reduction proposals in 2009 and beyond. Public Health needs a stable, long term funding source to effectively carry out our obligations to protect and improve the health, safety and quality of life for King County residents.

The King County Board of Health has called on the state of Washington to provide adequate, stable, dedicated, long-term financing for

local public health statewide and financing options for local jurisdictions to protect, promote and provide for the health of the public.

Additionally, it has urged that this issue top King County's state legislative agenda for the upcoming 2009 session.

The Metropolitan King County Council has declared public safety, health and quality of life as its first priorities for funding in the County budget. The public will have a chance to speak to its priorities at one of six public hearings that have now been scheduled throughout the county.

For more information about the budget hearings in October and November, you may visit www.kingcounty.gov/council

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Cold and Flu Prevention Tips

Basic hygiene and hand washing practices are another excellent way to prevent colds and flu:

- ◆ Wash hands or use an alcohol based rub, especially before eating, after bus rides, and whenever you enter the shelter setting. Stop germs at the door!
- ◆ Avoid touching your face.
- ◆ Cover coughs and sneezes with the inner elbow.



Smoke Free Support Corner



Smoking relieves stress!

Or does it?

More accurately, smoking is a method of *coping* with stress - but it is not the only way! The good news is that it is possible to find other coping mechanisms. The bad news is that smoking is an addiction that affects smokers emotionally, psychologically and biologically. Smoking also stimulates your body to release dopamine, epinephrine and norepinephrine - all chemicals that make someone feel good. It is no wonder that smokers feel smoking is the best way to cope with their stress.

It's important to realize that the biological addiction to nicotine actually *increases* the stress level for smokers as they wait anxiously for their next "fix." As nicotine levels fall, smokers begin to experience withdrawal symptoms such as irritability and headaches — the same symptoms people develop when they are stressed! Smokers train themselves to handle these symptoms by increasing their nicotine levels with smoking.



What a smoker can do to cope with stress besides smoke:

- ◆ Identify the triggers of stress (no job, caring for children, or money)
- ◆ Identify the stress symptoms (headaches, nervousness, or trouble sleeping)
- ◆ Create peaceful times in their day (for example, set aside time to take a slow walk)
- ◆ Practice deep breathing and other relaxation techniques
- ◆ Participate in group activities to get their mind off of problems
- ◆ Busy their hands with rubber bands, puzzles, or stress balls

As smokers find other ways to cope with stress, it is important to acknowledge that other coping methods will not be able to replicate all of the calming effects of smoking. However, the constant need for nicotine and the perpetual task of avoiding nicotine withdrawal creates far more stress on a person in the end. Ex-smokers that have given up smoking and found other ways to cope with stress report being far less stressed overall!

For local assistance with quitting:

- ◆ Ask your tobacco prevention site champ (If you don't have a site champ, contact Nori de la Pena at norilyn.delapena@kingcounty.gov or 206-263-8170.)
- ◆ Ask your health care or insurance provider



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<http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/personal/HCHN.aspx>